

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 JUNE 2010 PETITIONS

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

Author: Caroline Salisbury, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator

Summary

This report advises the Committee of the petitions presented to the Mayor at Council meetings including a summary of officer's response to the petitioners.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The constitution provides that petitions presented at Council meetings relating to matters within the remit of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be referred immediately to the relevant Director for consideration at officer level.

2. Background

2.1 Where the Director is able to fully meet the request of the petitioners a response is sent of the proposed action and timescales for implementation. The petition organiser may request to refer the matter to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee if s/he is not satisfied with the answer and has given reasons for their dissatisfaction.

2.2 For petitions where the Director is unable to meet the request of petitioners or where there are a range of alternative responses the petition will be referred to the next relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee for discussion.

3. Petitions

3.1 A summary of responses relevant to this Committee that have passed the ten day deadline for a request for referral to the Committee and are therefore seen as acceptable to the petitioners are set out below.

Subject of petition	Council Date Presented by	Response
Request to resurface a section of Third Avenue, Gillingham	4 March 2010 Councillor Smith	An inspection identified some erosion and minor potholes, however, its present condition does not reach a sufficiently high priority to receive resurfacing work in the near future. Third Avenue has been placed on a list of future works, should additional funds become available but this is unlikely within the next 2 or 3 years.
Request for Sturdee Avenue, Gillingham to be resurfaced.	4 March 2010 Councillor Crack	This road is programmed to be resurfaced during the forthcoming financial year and the works are expected to be undertaken during this summer.
Request for a grit box at Albury Close, Lordswood.	4 March 2010 Councillor Jarrett	During the severe winter weather the council received very many requests for salt bins. The Winter Service Plan allows for these only to be placed in hazardous locations, where there is potential for a serious accident to happen. On inspection, Albury Close has been found not to meet this criteria.
Better bus service for the residents of the White Road Estate – requesting re-instatement of a weekday evening and Sunday service.	4 March 2010 Councillor Maple	Arriva has recently added some evening journeys to and from the estate on Thursday and Friday evenings at their own commercial risk but they do not intend any further plans to change services in this area at present.
Request for traffic calming in Mierscourt Road, Rainham	15 April 2010 Councillor Griffiths	Officers agree that this road has road safety issues that need to be addressed. Proposals have been drawn up and agreement has also been made that a length of the road will be operated as a mobile safety camera site.
Request to re-instate the red tarmac surface in four cul-de-sacs within The Everglades, Hempstead	15 April 2010 Councillor Rodney Chambers	A meeting has been arranged for this matter to be discussed further.

Road calming measures in Dale Street, Chatham and increased uniform presence in Dale Street and the surrounding area	15 April 2010 Councillor Maple	In the last 3 years there has been one slight personal injury accident and 2 slight injury accidents recorded. Vehicle speed was not considered a contributory factor. With other locations recording significant personal injury accident problems it is not possible for a traffic-calming scheme to be introduced at this location at this time. The Safer Communities Officer, Kent Police and the PCSO for Central Chatham will continue to work closely and carry out high visibility patrols to deter any anti-social behaviour and give reassurance to local residents. The Community Safety Partnership has carried out co-ordinated multi-agency activities in the area and will continue to do so.
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4 Petitions referred to this committee

4.1 The following petition has been referred to the Committee for consideration as the lead petitioners have indicated that they are dissatisfied with the responses received.

4.2 Bus service from St Mary's Island to Chatham/Rochester schools

This petition was presented to Council on 4 March by Councillor Esterson. The petition stated:

"Request the council to establish a bespoke bus service for children travelling between St Mary's Island and secondary schools in Chatham and Rochester with immediate effect."

4.3 The Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture responded to the petition and the letter is attached at Appendix A.

4.4 The letter requesting referral to the Committee is attached at Appendix B.

4.5 This matter was also considered by council on 15 April 2010 where the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, was asked the following question:

"Many secondary school pupils, from the age of 11, are forced to spend three hours of their day (in addition to the school day) commuting via a series of buses from St Mary's Island. Is the Portfolio Holder aware of this, and if so, does he not agree that better school transport provision from St Mary's Island is required to improve our children's welfare and safety."

- 4.6 The Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer responded that he was aware of the concerns raised by residents of the existing bus service from St Mary's Island. He stated that although children travelling from St Mary's Island have to change buses at either Chatham bus station or railway station, generally, it should be possible to reach school within an hour with one change of bus. However, the Council was exploring ways in which school bus links from St Mary's Island might be improved and this had been added to the list for tenderers for the next academic year so bus operators can consider providing a direct service from St Mary's Island. Unfortunately, previously, bus operators had not shown any interest in providing a direct link but the Council would continue to work with them on provision.
- 4.7 A supplementary question referred to the under spend on the half price travel subsidy for young people last year and the Portfolio Holder was asked if he could give a commitment to diverting these funds towards supporting a procurement process to solve the problem.
- 4.8 Councillor Filmer responded that although there was an under spend on the half price bus fares for young people, the budget spent on subsidising other bus routes was up to £1 million. This was on buses for work related routes, rather than social evening use. Therefore a large proportion of the money had been used to ensure people were able to get to work. He again undertook to continue exploring possibilities to make improvements to bus routes for the school children on St Mary's Island.
- 4.9 Director's Comments

By changing buses in Chatham it is possible to get from St Mary's Island to the various secondary schools in Chatham and Rochester. It is not uncommon for children to have to change buses where, for whatever reason, it is not possible to offer a direct service between home and school, even if children qualify for free school travel because they live 3 miles or more from their nearest appropriate school.

The residents of St Mary's Island have suggested that there are 57 children who would use this service attending 6 schools – Fort Pitt, Rochester Grammar School for Girls, Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School for Boys, Thomas Aveling, Chatham Grammar School for Boys and St John Fisher. Because of the differing school start and finish times, for some of these schools the journey may be quite lengthy if one journey is provided.

Nevertheless, the opportunity for this service has been discussed with a number of bus companies. So far no operator has shown an interest in providing this service unless a subsidy is paid.

If a Council does offer a subsidy for a bus service it is obliged to invite tenders. This service has, therefore, been added to the planned tender for contract renewals from September 2010. The closing date for these tenders is 3 June 2010.

The inclusion of this service in the planned tender will allow a detailed consideration of the opportunity to provide this service. However, this does not guarantee that a contract will be awarded. The outcome of the tenders will be considered by Cabinet in due course. At this stage, the budget for the support of bus services is fully committed and therefore this new service – if it does require a subsidy – can only be considered if the tenders for other services yield savings, bus services elsewhere are curtailed or funding is made available from other sources.

If a new service is introduced as a scheduled bus service, users will be able to travel at half-fare if they have the appropriate pass. Half-fare travel with these passes is funded by the Council from a separate budget. In past years, the cost of this concession has proved to be less than the budget allocated. The costs of half-fares are expected to rise this year because of the full year impact of the extension to age 18 and the increasing number of passes in circulation.

5 Financial and Legal Implications

- 5.1 Any financial and/or legal implications arising from the issues raised by the petitions are set out in the comments on the petitions.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 Members are requested to:
- (a) note the petition responses and appropriate officer action in paragraph 3 of the report;
 - (b) consider the petition referral and Director's comments in paragraph 4 of the report.

Background papers

None

Contact for further details:

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Email: caroline.salisbury@medway.gov.uk

Please contact: Lynn Utchanah

Your ref:

Our ref: RC/ME67

Date: 16 March 2010

Ms P Matthewman
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St Mary's Island
Chatham
Kent

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Dear Ms Matthewman

Petition – Bus Services from St Mary's Island to Chatham/Rochester Schools

Thank you for your petition that was presented at Council on 4 March 2010, requesting the provision of a bespoke bus service between St Mary's Island and the secondary schools in Chatham and Rochester.

Since the deregulation of bus services in 1986, bus operators may run where and when they choose if they feel that there are sufficient passengers for them to do so without a subsidy. Where no operator is prepared to do this, but there is felt to be a need for a service, a Council can offer a subsidy, but is obliged to invite tenders from all interested bus companies to run the service.

There have already been a number of discussions with Arriva about the possibility of providing a direct service from St Mary's Island to various schools. However, the company has said that they are unable to offer this link without financial support. The Council has also approached a number of other bus companies to see if they are interested in providing this link. So far, nobody has responded with a firm proposal.

From the Council's point of view, the budget for the support of bus services is currently fully committed and I am unable to offer any additional services in the immediate future. As I have explained above, if the Council is to fund a service, I am obliged to issue tenders to all operators to give them the opportunity to bid. I shall shortly be inviting tenders to continue a number of contracts that are due to expire in September. I shall add the service that you have requested to these tenders so that we know the costs and opportunities to run this route. Adding this service to the tenders will also let all the

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operators know that there is felt to be a need for this service to be provided and they may also put forward suggestions of how this can be done.

A possible timetable for this service has been devised which is shown below. This takes account of the various different start and finish times of the schools which have been included in the previous discussions and also the time allowed at the moment for buses to travel over the various sections of road involved. You will see that it is difficult for one bus to achieve the ideal time at each school. In addition, the afternoon journey would need to wait 6 minutes at Chatham Boys Grammar School (or leave the previous schools 6 minutes later) because of the different finishing times.

Mornings

	School start	Bus time	Bus arrival - Minutes before school start
St Marys Island		0758	
Fort Pitt	0820	0810	10
Maths/Roch Girls Gr	0825	0818	7
Thomas Aveling	0840	0823	17
Chatham Boys Gr	0840	0827	13
St John Fisher (M Rd)	0845	0829	16
St John Fisher (Rly Stn)	0845	0833	12

Afternoons

	School finish		Bus time	Bus departure - Minutes after school finish
Fort Pitt	1500		1515	15
Maths/Roch Girls Gr	1510		1525	15
Thomas Aveling	1500		1530	30
Chatham Boys Gr	1535	arrive	1539	
		depart	1545	10
St John Fisher (M Rd)	1530		1547	17
St John Fisher (Rly Stn)	1530		1551	21
St Marys Island			1600	

I cannot promise, at this stage, that the service you have requested will be provided but including this service in the next round of tenders will allow the opportunity for this service to be considered in detail with the responses which are received to the tenders.

I am sorry that I cannot be more positive at this stage. However, it is still possible to make this journey by changing bus at either Chatham Bus Station or Chatham Railway Station. However, we will look, in detail, at the possibility of providing a service to your area from September and will let you know the outcome of this review in due course.

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I hope the information is helpful. If you do not consider that the issues raised in your petition have been addressed, please refer to the procedure sent with the acknowledgment letter for a possible further course of action.

Yours sincerely

Robin Cooper
Director - Regeneration, Community & Culture

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12 Little Victory Mount
St Marys Island
Chatham
Kent
ME4 3TB

22nd March 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

Re Petition; Bus Service from St Marys Island to Chatham/Rochester Schools

We have received a response to this petition from Robin Cooper (Your Ref RC/ME67, 16th March 2010).

We are not satisfied with the directorate's response and request that the matter is referred to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

We would like an immediate commitment from Medway Council for a direct bus service and question the assumption that the budget for support of bus services is currently fully committed.

Yours Sincerely



Patricia Matthewman
On behalf of St Marys Island Residents

CC - Robin Cooper.